

**Stamford School Readiness Council (SRC)**  
**Education Committee Meeting**  
**Monday, September 26, 2011**  
**12:30 p.m.**  
**UConn Stamford**

**MEETING SUMMARY**

**In attendance:**

Karen Brennan	Stamford Discovery Coordinator, United Way of Western CT
Anne Farrell, Chair	Associate Professor, Human Development & Family Studies, UConn
Bridget Fox	Chair, Stamford School Readiness Council
Barbara Garvin-Kester	Executive Director, Childcare Learning Centers
Sadie Green Carter	President/Director, Mother's Little Helper
Jennifer Hallissey	Vice President, Education, United Way of Western CT
Joan Parris	Program Director, Early Childhood Program, Norwalk Community College
Karen Wenz	Director, First Presbyterian Church Nursery School

**Guests:**

Sonja Ahuja	Liaison, Graustein Memorial Fund
Cristin Caparotta	UConn Honors Scholar, Human Development & Family Studies

**Welcome & Overview of the Education Committee Work (Anne Farrell and Bridget Fox)**

Anne welcomed everyone back from the summer and invited members, new and old, to introduce themselves. She and Bridget explained that they have been actively working to recruit new members to the Education Committee (SRC-EC). Bridget shared a year in review handout summarizing the work of the School Readiness Council and its subcommittees.

**Advocacy Issues (Bridget Fox, Barbara Garvin-Kester, Joan Parris)**

Barbara Garvin-Kester and Bridget Fox shared a number of legislative happenings in EC:

- Bridget Fox shared the web site describing the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) grant competition, <http://www.ctearlychildhood.org/race-to-the-top-early-learning-challenge.html>. This will focus on improving early learning and development programs for young children supporting states' efforts to:
  - Increase the number and percentage of low-income and disadvantaged children in each age group of infants, toddlers and preschoolers who are enrolled in high-quality early learning programs;
  - Design and implement an integrated system of high-quality early learning programs and services; and,
  - Ensure that any use of assessments conforms with the recommendations of the National Research Council's reports on early childhood.
- In September, a subgroup of the SRC conferred and developed a statement and recommendations for CT's Race to the Top application. It appeared on an online forum (and was distributed at the SRC-EC meeting; see Addendum A).
- Bridget also shared the [www.cga.ct.gov](http://www.cga.ct.gov) web site, a good source of information for current legislative news. Senate Bill 1103 for the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance was passed and sets up a two-year planning process to look at all early childhood (EC)

funding streams and make recommendations to the General Assembly and Governor Malloy's administration around creating a coordinated early childhood system. The bill calls for the system to be in place by July 2013.

- Barbara Garvin-Kester reported that she attended the CT Early Childhood Alliance's retreat on September 21. Two themes emerged: 1) a consensus that regardless of whether Connecticut receives Race to the Top funding, the EC community will move forward with initiatives, and 2) the timing for the proposed merger of School Readiness Programs and DDS programs will likely be longer than planned.
- Joan Parris described the bill recently passed that calls for 50% of state funded/lead teachers to hold an associate degree and 50% to hold a bachelor's degree by 2015, and for all to hold a bachelor's degree by 2020. A discussion followed with members discussing how private programs would or would not be affected, what this means to the quality of programs, and how all programs, state funded and private, will struggle to compensate teachers with higher degrees. Additionally, there is concern about employees' ability to fund the needed higher education experiences.

### **Education Committee Plan for the Coming Year (Anne Farrell)**

#### **1. Focus Group Study:**

Over the past 12-18 months, the Committee has discussed professional development (PD) at length. This is our focus in the coming year and we are fortunate enough to have a UConn Honors Scholar assisting us with this work. Cristin Caparotta joined us for the meeting, and with Anne, described the lack of knowledge regarding what teachers and program leaders want or need in the area of professional development. There is a dearth of information available to inform an understanding of the perceived PD and related support needs of EC professionals in general and particularly in Connecticut, where a great deal of change has occurred in the past few years.

A series of focus groups run by trained facilitators will elicit input from teachers and program leadership regarding perceived needs for professional development and education. Committee members offered their assistance:

- Sonja Ahuja is available to train focus group facilitators in sessions likely to require about 3 hours.
- Barbara Garvin-Kester suggested we run focus groups on scheduled professional development days.
- Joan Parris offered to facilitate focus groups in Norwalk.
- Jennifer Hallisey offered to recruit facilitators/recorders from among the United Way's corporate contacts.
- Karen Wenz offered space at First Presbyterian Church Nursery School for evening focus groups and suggested we have multiple groups running concurrently in order to increase our numbers.

Each focus group will include approximately 10-12 participants and require a facilitator and recorder. Discussions will be recorded and transcribed although participant identities will be masked (no identifying information will appear in the transcript, and recordings will be destroyed following transcription). Following completion of the groups, Anne Farrell and Cristin Caparotta will conduct a thematic analysis and produce a technical report for the

SRC. This study requires the approval of the UConn Institutional Review Board (IRB), which is the federally-designated entity responsible to review studies to assure the ethical treatment of participants as well as proper consent. This is a minimal risk study and will likely be eligible for expedited review.

There was a consensus that that the study will inform the collaborative work of a number of groups including the Stamford School Readiness Council, UConn, NCC, NAEYC, FAEYC.

**\*Follow-up/focus group study:**

*Anne Farrell and Cristin Caparotta* will:

- Share with members a projected work plan and timeline in order to facilitate planning, resources, and recruiting.
- Share with Sonya Ahuja the draft focus group questions.

**At the next meeting**, discussion and planning will continue and draft focus group questions will be shared for comment.

**2. Major collaborative EC Professional Development event for Fall 2012:**

The Committee began a discussion and brainstorming session about a major collaborative PD event to be held at UConn in the fall of 2012. There is shared commitment among the SRC, UConn, NCC, and FCAEYC that there is demand and need for a county-wide, collaborative event and the SRC-EC members will work to plan and support the event.

**\*Follow-up/PD event:**

*Cosponsors* will discuss collaboration and format prior to the next meeting. Anne Farrell and Bridget Fox will facilitate this.

*Committee members*, please bring the following to the next SRC-EC meeting:

- School and program calendars (and suggestions for PD event dates that will suit a range of schedules)
- Suggestions for schedule format (day, evening, weekday, weekend, and combinations in which, for example, a 2-day event in which the keynote speaker presents twice (day/evening) and breakout sessions are available in both day and evening.
- Suggestions for training format (keynote speaker + breakout sessions, are multi-session workshops a possibility)
- Topics that fit under the broad umbrella of supporting school readiness that can be meaningfully linked to the Preschool Curriculum and Preschool Assessment Frameworks.

**3. Other:**

Bridget Fox will be on maternity leave beginning in late January/early February and Anne Farrell will be on research sabbatical for the spring semester (to include the focus group study). There may be an interim chair and the Committee will be informed of plans and meeting dates. There may be a reduced meeting schedule in early 2012, however, subgroups may be meeting to plan the PD event and coordinate focus group activities.

**NOTE: Our next meeting is Monday, October 31<sup>st</sup> at UConn Stamford from 12:30-2:00 p.m. This is a date change!**

## **Addendum A: Race to the Top Comments**

Stamford School Readiness Council

Race to the Top Comments Posted on September 20, 2011

The Stamford School Readiness Council is pleased to provide comments on Connecticut's application for Race to the Top funding, which we enthusiastically endorse. These comments focus predominantly on the achievements and continuing priorities of Stamford, however, we offer these comments in full consideration of statewide efforts.

### **Accomplishments:**

The Stamford community has a demonstrated, longstanding commitment to early childhood education and care. In 1996, 38% of Stamford children entered kindergarten with no preschool experience of any kind. In the past 15 years, Stamford has narrowed that gap significantly. Inasmuch as Stamford's commitment to early learning and education is longstanding and substantial, we believe that our efforts and achievements can add valuable context as the State prepares its Race to the Top application.

With the support of the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund, Stamford recently engaged in an ambitious early childhood blueprint development process. Subsequently, the Stamford School Readiness Council continues to leverage significant resources around the following areas of focus: Early Childhood Education, Health and Wellness and Parent Outreach. These three working groups have assessed the state of early care and education in Stamford. The following priorities reflect the input of the three committees charged with strengthening our existing early childhood education and care system.

Below please find the grant priorities along with significant objectives that we suggest:

### **A. Successful State Systems**

- Stamford currently has no state-subsidized infant/toddler slots. We advocate that the state include in its RTT application a request for increased access to and sufficient reimbursement for high-quality infant/toddler slots.
- Stamford supports strengthening the Regional Education Service Centers in order to align, promote and coordinate what is happening state-wide around early childhood curriculum and professional development.
- Stamford supports a focus on continuity of instruction and a coordination of instructional strategies between preschool and kindergarten. This would allow the introduction of standards, as manifested by the Common Core in 2014 to be introduced into a comprehensive pre-k-12 system.

### **B. High Quality Accountable Programs**

- Stamford agrees with the importance of having a state-wide quality rating system for our local state-funded early childhood programs.

- We recommend that NAEYC accredited early childhood programs should not need to repeat lower-tiered requirements in any new system.

- Stamford supports an application that prioritizes a consistent, cohesive, and comprehensive set of statewide policies, regulations, and administrative procedures that will ensure ongoing quality improvement, link meaningfully to professional development, and promote diverse, inclusive classrooms that promote the school readiness of all children.

### C. Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children

- In Stamford, the primary focus of our state-funded programs is whole child development. The social-emotional growth of a child is at the core of early childhood development which leads to academic and life-long success.

- With the recent push by the State to promote the Infant and Toddler Early Learning Guidelines and the continued State and local efforts to incorporate the Preschool Assessment Framework and the Preschool Curriculum Framework in our early childhood programs, Stamford has strengthened the readiness of our incoming kindergarten children.

- Stamford recommends that any assessments that are developed be developmentally appropriate using objective criteria.

- Stamford recommends that the State provides funding and targeted structural support at the local level for the health, behavioral and developmental needs of children with high needs to improve school readiness.

### D. A Great Early Childhood Workforce

- Our early educators and leaders need to have access in the city to high-quality and affordable early childhood degree programs. Currently Stamford has minimal access to high-quality early childhood credentialing degree programs. We request that the RTT application has a plan to address this concern.

### E. Measuring Outcomes and Progress

- Stamford is advocating for a standardized state-wide kindergarten assessment to be administered prior to kindergarten entry in order to inform instruction.

- We recommend that the State build upon the existing Kindergarten Inventory by ensuring that it is administered objectively and is standardized across all CT public school districts.

- Given the demographic make-up of a city like Stamford, we strongly recommend that the K Inventory take into account the multiple languages our children speak.